



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **January 23, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Ann E. Franzen
Helen A. Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Stacey F. Winkler

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Susan F. Friedman
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Sandra Rudnick

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

Jason Anderson
William Johnson

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the January 23, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the January 9, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved as amended.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg reported on a collaborative education initiative on early identification and early intervention for young children having learning problems or needing special-education services. Recent Federal law mandates that all children from birth to 36 months who undergo any sort of trauma receive early intervention services, and she is concerned that the Education Coordinating Council's blueprint for raising the educational achievement of foster and probation youth—being finalized this week—does not sufficiently address this legislation. As the department recently informed the Commission, 43 percent of the children coming into the system from May to November 2005 were age five and under, so the issue is an important one.
- The Commission has been asked to participate on the hiring committee for the department's division chief in charge of governmental relations, a position being vacated by the retiring Beverly Muench. Because of Vice Chair Rudnick's illness, Chair Kleinberg will serve as the Commission's representative on that committee.
- The Commission's new website is slated to go live on February 27, and staff is soliciting short bios from each Commissioner. Dana Blackwell distributed a sample to use as a template, saying that a photographer can be scheduled if Commissioners are interested in also posting their pictures on the website. Commissioner Biondi questioned the advisability of including photographs because of security concerns, and Commissioners were asked to contact Elizabeth Hinton to communicate their preferences one way or another. Bios are due to the office by February 6, 2006.
- Commissioner Williams announced that First 5 LA has earmarked \$50 million to go to agencies to address issues of prevention for children birth to age five. Many discussions are in the works regarding how these initiatives will fit in with departmental efforts, how they will coordinate with the medical hubs, how and when to assess children and what tools to use, and ongoing relationships with Regional Centers, which are independent bodies lacking a countywide focus.
- A question arose at the January 9th meeting regarding the continuation of Medi-Cal eligibility for runaway youth. Commissioner Biondi reported that the recent policy for AWOL youth not being able to use their Medi-Cal benefits has changed; those benefits are now "open" and accessible to them. All departmental 'FYI' notices go to legal advocates, but the children themselves should also be notified about this change in policy, and Dr. Sanders will ask Judge Nash to make sure judges are aware.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

DCFS is studying the recent high-profile child deaths in New York to see what lessons Los Angeles County might learn. Dr. Sanders is putting together a comparison of the two systems for the Board of Supervisors, and will make sure that Commissioners receive a

copy. Differences include the fact that Los Angeles County uses structured decision-making and New York does not, and that this county probably has smaller emergency-response caseloads than New York. Commissioner Biondi also mentioned that if there is any question about safely interviewing a family when Los Angeles emergency-response workers first travel to the home, they are accompanied by law enforcement personnel; this is not the case in New York. She also commented that the *Los Angeles Times* chose to cover the New York child deaths, but not recent local high profile incidents.

NORTH HOLLYWOOD OFFICE REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS

Concurrent planning starts at the emergency-response stage, when staff begin the search for relatives or other individuals who can provide a safe, permanent home if children cannot return to their families. Assistant regional administrator Octavia Johnson said that, at the North Hollywood office—one of five involved in the concurrent planning redesign pilot—staff had been initially resistant to taking on new roles, and overwhelmed by the thought of handling adoptions. Training and technical assistance, adequate coverage, and making sure responsibilities are fully understood have gone a long way toward making the pilot implementation successful. Outreach has involved presentations to numerous community partners, who now meet once a month. Community members also attend team decision-making (TDM) meetings, which are done for every child for whom detainment is being considered, and for every voluntary placement agreement. Over the last five months, North Hollywood has moved into the 90th or 95th percentile of completing TDMs and other required procedures in a timely fashion. Staff are being identified to work on the upcoming Permanency Partners Program (P3), though no training has yet taken place, and point of engagement is scheduled to roll out at the end of February or beginning of March.

The key to overcoming staff resistance to change, said supervisor Arena Cole, is to help workers find the value in additional tasks, focusing on the outcomes of improving child safety, enhancing permanence, and reducing reliance on out-of-home care. Workers no longer feel isolated in the decision-making process, and realize they now have the tools to reach those goals. Supervisor Payam Kade said that the TDM process—which can bring together relatives, doctors, fellow church-goers, friends, and others—reminded him of his childhood, when the whole family got involved if a child had a problem. In one case last month, where children were about to be removed because the home was so filthy, the mother was found to have been suicidally depressed for the past five years. A grandmother paid for an uncle to replace the home's carpet, and she herself moved into the home to ensure the children's safety. The mother was referred to the Department of Mental Health for assessment, and family members agreed to drive the mother to treatment. Kade mentioned the need for more TDM facilitators who understand human behavior and child development; children under age five are a large portion of the office's emergency-response caseload, and their attachment to their families is very strong even when there has been some neglect or mild abuse.

Assistant regional administrator Kathee Saito said that North Hollywood is implementing the TDM modality within the office as well, with staff participating in decision-making

and thereby taking ownership of the various permanency initiatives. It is critical that office leaders convey their own commitment to the changed mindset, and assess their staff to support them along the same journey.

Ms. Saito updated some information in Commission packets: a June 17, 2005, report showing 677 children in long-term foster care included 125 children who had achieved permanency and 58 children whose cases had been closed (70 percent of whom had achieved permanency). By the time the plan for reducing the number of children in long-term foster care was written in September 2005, the system had been updated to exclude those children. With 45 cases having been transferred to other offices, North Hollywood currently has about 450 children in long-term foster care. For 4 percent, the plan is for them to return home to their parents; adoption has been identified as the plan for 40 percent, and legal guardianship for 9 percent. (Ms. Saito was not sure whether or not the 40 percent for whom adoption was planned were already in pre-adoptive homes; she will provide that information to Commissioners.) This leaves 48 percent, or 212 children, in true long-term foster care.

Factors that will contribute to a permanency plan for these children are concurrent planning, team decision-making, and the tenacity of workers in helping caregivers to understand the importance of adoption and legal guardianship for the children, and in raising their comfort level with different permanency options. A permanency planning liaison from adoptions is talking to all caregivers individually, for example, and a kinship liaison is committed to supporting relative caregivers. Groups identified for particular focus are children placed with relatives and nonrelated extended family members, children 13 and younger, and children receiving court-ordered family reunification services for 13 months or more. The multidisciplinary regional permanency review teams, which meet three times a month, analyze barriers to permanency and are working on tracking outcomes and follow-up. Minors' attorneys are active, as are representatives from emancipation, kinship, system of care wraparound, family preservation, and family support programs. Staffing for the Permanency Partners Program (P3) is being increased so that P3 liaisons may link with older youth, and monthly meetings with resource families are being held to plan quarterly events with community partners. Internally, an office initiatives committee involving all staff levels meets monthly to oversee the permanency work, with the goal of using the TDM process to review and prioritize the cases of all children in long-term foster care within the next few months.

Challenges include the further education of staff and community partners on permanency alternatives, since some caregivers are hesitant to commit to adoption or legal guardianship without more information about financial and other issues to make them comfortable with those decisions. The myth that older children are not adoptable must be dispelled, and more mental health resources are needed to stabilize children with behavioral or other problems—often caused by placement disruption—before they find a permanent home. More resource families who are willing to adopt are also needed. A newsletter and website are being considered to help celebrate successes and improve communication.

The court's permanency work group has also identified children in long-term foster care as a focus, and North Hollywood is incorporating that body's efforts. A much closer collaboration with adoptions staff is evident, as are the positive effects of outreach in involving community-based organizations in TDMs, in-home counseling, and other services. Public Counsel is interested in a mentoring program, which would align with the Board of Supervisor's goal for every foster? child in the county to have a mentor by 2010.

Regional administrator Dawna Yokoyama reviewed initiatives involving community partners that are guided by the Casey Family Foundation's Family 2 Family approach, which empowers the community to assist the department in helping them.

- In June 2005, meetings began with resource family leaders, including the president of the foster parents' association, relative caregiver representatives, members of Grandparents As Parents, and providers who offer training for resources families. In the past, such meetings have dealt with rates and financial issues, but this one focused on outcomes for children and how different ways of delivering services can contribute to improved results. An event in September with an education theme, which Ms. Yokoyama co-chaired with the president of the foster parents' association, offered speakers, break-out sessions, and a resource fair for staff, resource families, and community partners. The group has committed to quarterly events, with a permanency-themed agenda planned for March 2006 that will address questions about adoptions, Kin-gap, legal guardianship, etc.
- With the cooperation of the Glendale Unified School District, the North Hollywood office is sending teams of social workers to speak at monthly staff meetings at all Glendale elementary schools. These teams are intended to enhance the department/district working relationship and to share protocols and service delivery approaches. Because schools interact regularly with children and families—and are not seen as the 'threat' that child protective services can be—they can play a central role in getting departmental messages out. The program should expand into Pacoima soon.

In SPA 2, the department is also focusing on collaborating with child care directors at schools and informal child care resource centers, to address the fact that 25 percent of children in the system are under the age of four. North Hollywood is one of eight DCFS offices which will make referrals to one of the First 5 LA's Partnership for Families (PFF) grantees when PFF implementation begins in July 2006.

- Thanks to assistance from the Children's Planning Council and the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Bureau, a community-based family support center in the east San Fernando Valley now coordinates services to families from DCFS and the departments of Public Social Services, Mental Health, Health Services, and Child Support Services. Linkages between child welfare and CalWORKs projects are also developing, and both Dr. Sanders and DPSS department head Bryce Yokomizo are supportive. Beginning in February, North Hollywood and Metro North emergency-referral workers will assess families' eligibility for DPSS programs, and let them know the address of the nearest DPSS office. In turn, DPSS has promised to expedite

those applications when they are received. DPSS GAIN workers will also attend TDM and family preservation meetings, and current DPSS clients will be screened for child abuse and neglect. Ways to ensure continued CalWORKs participation and expedite reunification for families whose children are detained are also being explored, since supportive services are often cut off when children are removed, and that lack of income can prevent their being reunified.

- A parent partners program is being started to link experienced resource families with open cases.
- As the population served by the North Hollywood office changes, outreach to the Latino community is increasing.

In answer to a question about the feasibility of qualified volunteers being used to facilitate TDM meetings, both Ms. Johnson and Mr. Kade said the flow of emergency-response TDMs can be unpredictable: their short window of time means that in-house staff can sometimes do five or six in a day. If a qualified facilitator were available one day a week, as Commissioner Fahey suggested, that could help with workload issues. Dr. Sanders said that full staffing of the facilitator role is going into his next budget request.

Given the difficulties mentioned in getting staff to support new approaches, Commissioner Biondi asked if their resistance is made part of performance reviews. Ms. Yokoyama said that it was, but the more successful approach is to work with reluctant staff to persuade them of the improved outcomes for children in store.

Chair Kleinberg has heard that some TDM meetings are being held without family members present, which defeats their purpose. Mr. Kade said that if family members cannot participate in any other way, his emergency-response unit holds TDMs in their homes; he has been known to send cars for them as well. Meetings take place in churches, at family preservation agencies, and in the offices of other community partners. According to Ms. Yokoyama, the only TDM to take place in North Hollywood without family members present was one for which they didn't show up. In that case, staff was forced to make interim decisions, since the family was resisting participation and the child needed protection. Dr. Sanders said that though he can imagine some circumstances in which family members would not participate, it doesn't make much sense to do a TDM without them. Department-wide, he believes that family participation is about 85 percent, though he wasn't sure of the circumstances for the remaining 15 percent.

PALMDALE OFFICE REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS

Although Palmdale is not scheduled to implement point of engagement until the end of February or beginning of March, according to regional administrator Rick Bryant, preparation is well underway. Trainings were held in November and December and an advisory team meets weekly to address concerns. An additional 10 social workers—still needing to be trained—will join the office next week, though it will be approximately 90 days before they carry a full caseload.

Assistant regional administrator Marty Nagel said that the advisory team is exploring staff responsibilities and commitment, with a subgroup paying particular attention to the key role of the intensive services worker (ISW) who keeps a case for its first 30 to 45 days, taking care of many preliminary details, before handing it off to a generic worker. (To address concerns regarding appropriate medical care, for example, a tracking form is being developed for that hand-off, and best practices from the supervisors of ISWs in other offices are being studied.) Because ISW caseloads are small by design, at least two experienced workers will be needed to handle the number of children being detained; a memo to solicit interest in the ISW positions has been distributed. Two-thirds of the Palmdale staff are new-hires or recent trainees, so ISWs will be recruited from the 25 to 30 seasoned workers there. Ideally, the office as a whole should have 85 full-time staff.

Another subgroup deals with voluntary family maintenance, resolving disputes over what is written in case plans or what happens when families no longer want to cooperate. This group is also tracking alternative-response referrals to make sure services are in place.

North Hollywood implemented strategic decision-making in April 2004, and the shift from worker-driven decisions, based on experience and judgment, to joint determinations reached by assessing family strengths through objective criteria was admittedly difficult. The transformation has been made, however, and staff now acknowledge the importance of the strategic decision-making tool. One of its advantages, said Dr. Sanders, is the research being gathered on the approach's effectiveness from different parts of the country. When data at the end of a case turns out to be inconsistent with that expected from the initial assessment—especially if the child is detained—more work needs to be done.

Though the Antelope Valley reportedly has more instances of the illegal production of methamphetamines and other drugs, assistant regional administrator Sue Pommerville said that she hasn't seen any more children in danger from meth-lab environments there than in other parts of the county. Numerous inpatient and outpatient programs exist for drug rehabilitation and domestic violence, and representatives from those agencies are often involved in TDM meetings. Drug-exposed families have many resources, but competent screening, getting them into the right program, is still necessary.

Commissioner Ma asked about the tracking systems mentioned by Mr. Nagel, and he clarified that alternative response referrals are tracked to make sure cases are not closed before the emergency-response unit initiates services. The success of point of engagement will also be monitored. Commissioner Ma then inquired about the numbers of children being detained in Palmdale, and if two intensive services workers will be sufficient. Mr. Nagel said that the monthly detention numbers have been running in the low 40s, though they have dropped dramatically over the last several months.

Ms. Pommerville reported that although Palmdale is not part of the concurrent planning redesign pilot, it did co-locate adoptions staff in May 2005 and is working on specific cases with them. Outreach to foster caregivers in the community is ongoing, and family group decision-making conferences bring entire families together for permanency planning. Social workers are still needed for P3 but the nine retirees who have signed on to

work in the SPA have reunified children with long-lost parents and facilitated the adoption by a former foster parent of a youth already turned 18. Additional funding for P3 is now available.

With regard to moving children out of long-term foster care, Ms. Pommerville said that some youth are resistant to the idea of adoption or legal guardianship, but staff is working hard to connect every child with a significant adult—mentor, coach, teacher, former foster parent, relative—and to shift from residential care to foster settings that will at least entertain the idea of legal permanency. With team decision-making, which Palmdale began in August 2004, surveys show that many families come in to the process afraid and anxious but leave feeling relieved. Connections with faith-based organizations are still needed, and a community resource day is being planned. A parent engagement project, recruiting parent mentors to help guide others new to the system, begins next month in cooperation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Some years ago, the Commission received information about children from South Los Angeles being permanently placed in the Antelope Valley, and Vice Chair Sorkin asked how P3 is working with those children. One P3 worker in Lancaster, Ms. Pommerville said, located a mother who had moved to Orange County with a new family and lost touch with her child. Connecting children and adults across counties can be done, though Dr. Sanders admitted that it was not a strategy being looked at department-wide. What drives many families to move, Mr. Nagel said, is the cost of housing, which is a hardship for both families and workers. Family visits to and from the Antelope Valley are facilitated through the Metrolink train and bus network whenever possible.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED